



TO: Lynn Johnson
FROM: Deane Finnegan
DATE: January 27, 2014
RE: Golf Facilitation

Report on Lincoln City Golf Sustainability Plan Facilitation

Approximately 80 individuals attended the meeting held at East High School the evening of January 16, 2014. The general feeling of those in attendance was positive towards the Strategic Plan. Participants liked that there was something in writing and that they had the opportunity to respond to the recommendations. Comments were made that the Strategic Plan was a good start. At the same time, there were areas the group felt needed to be further discussed, explained and/or enhanced.

Four themes became readily apparent when reading the notes from the recorders of each small group. These themes are outlined below:

INCREASE IN FEES

In general, there was an acceptance of the proposed fee increase. People recognized the need to do something now in order to keep the courses. Again, in general, they felt a 4% increase was fair. However, there were concerns about the fee increase as it might impact those on a fixed income and there was discussion about how to handle that issue.

While accepting the fee increase, those in attendance had very strong feeling about the need to tie the increase in fees to **INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY** (Theme #3) and **MAINTENANCE OF THE COURSES** (Theme #4).

There was much discussion about the **"TIERED FEE PROPOSAL"** (Theme # 2). People were uncertain about the tiered fee structure and what it meant to have the Highlands designated as "premier". It would appear that the Tiered Fee Proposal needs more explanation before it can gather the support of players. There were more questions about this than acceptance or rejection of the proposal.

INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY (Theme # 3)

Strong opinions were voiced that enhanced checks and balances needed to be in place. There was concern that golf fees were going into the Parks and Rec general fund rather than back into the golf program. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the City's structure for accounting for funds. Concern was expressed that receipts at the golf course needed to be itemized so players knew where the dollars were going to enhance transparency. Questions were raised as to why golf was treated differently than swimming pools, which do not need to be self-sustaining. This is probably due to a lack of understanding of City policy.

Other areas that concerned participants included customer service at the golf courses. It was indicated that, at times, there was not a welcoming/customer service approach towards the users. Feelings were expressed that all staff needed to be held accountable and to make players feel welcome rather than standing behind the counters talking with one another..



There was confusion about the management structure of the courses. The flow chart does not include Pros and the question was “why?” The participants, in general, felt the Pros and the Superintendents needed to work together in a better manner and players needed to know who was in charge.

Questions about the management structure also surrounded the Marshall Program. Participants wanted to know what powers they would have and to see some specific guidelines. Without this information, they did not see the Marshall Program working. At the same time, participants recognized the need to speed up play on the courses and felt, at this time, it was hard to get players to respond.

MAINTENANCE OF THE COURSES (Theme #4)

Again, tied to the acceptance of the increase of fees was the expectation of improved maintenance of the courses. Participants would like to see a specific plan put into place for repairs, improvements and maintenance. They would also like to see the capital improvements prioritized and dollars put into maintaining the courses rather than enhancing the clubhouses. They also would like to have a true understanding of the costs of repairs.

There was recognition of the drought having caused some problems and there were questions about having a contingency fund for weather-related issues and asked about creative ways to cut costs and partner with other agencies to improve the courses.

All-in-all, the Leadership Lincoln facilitators felt the conversations were civil and that people were interested in addressing the plan and talking with one another about their concerns. We appreciated the opportunity to work on this project and welcome any questions you might have.

We have attached a summary of comments from the small group recorders below.



Group Recorder Comments/Themes

Strategic Plan

Overall, good start. Something to react to and gives direction.
Would like to know how the plan changes what is currently in place.
Lots of areas left out- all different fees, clubhouse, golf fees.
Like the plan!
If something isn't done, we will lose the Highlands.

Accountability

Lip service in the past. Is it going to happen now?
Management structure needs to be clarified with specifics
Golf pros need a prominent role
How will maintenance be connected to golf pros?
Golf Superintendents and Pros need to work hand in hand.
Flow Chart on Maintenance does not have Golf Pro on the chart
Who is in charge? Rain? Lightening? Cart?
Where is the authority in the plan?
Checks and balances need to be in place for contracts.
Must ensure the dollars go into the golf program not Lincoln Parks and Rec
Staff needs to provide more customer service and be more welcoming...should focus on the customer and not stand behind counter with peers
All staff need to be held accountable
Golf dollars should be used specifically for golf
Oversight is key.
Itemized receipts are needed to show where the dollars go...TRANSPARENCY!
Need for better cooperation between Pros and Superintendents.
Need to relook at how Pros are compensated.

Fees

Keep fees even for all courses
General acceptance for funding repair and replacement
4% increase mostly okay
Group would accept the 4% increase
Okay with fee discounts for times of low play
Need to see improvements with increased fees
Fair
If condition of courses improve, fees should go up
Good to raise prices to improve conditions of all courses
Fees should match maintenance and upkeep
Concern for senior golfers
Tie fees to increase of social security pay
Raise all course fees equally so facilities and courses become higher quality not just the Highlands
If fees keep going up, those of fixed incomes will be unable to play.
Fee increase is okay.



Tier Structure

Five of the six participants would be opposed to a tiered structure. Consistent increase across all courses, instead.

Premier course failed in Minnesota

Winter rates? Has it increased play at reduced rates?

Perhaps courses should be rated harder to easier and speed of play

Don't know that a different fee structure for each course will be effective

If Highlands is designated as a "premier" course, then it needs to have different and more services

Not sure the Highlands is "premier" but if it costs more, then it is okay to charge more.

Marshalls

Need more details. What powers will they have?

Hard to get the players to respond.

Specific guidelines are needed, otherwise don't see it working.

Five hour rounds of golf are not okay....need to keep the courses moving.

Surcharge

Eliminate the surcharge and figure it in elsewhere

Maintenance

Should be concerned about the maintenance of the courses and not necessarily the clubhouses

A specific plan needs to be put in place for repairs, improvements and maintenance

Need a true understanding of costs associated with repairs.

Should be a part of the greens fees

Capital improvements need to be prioritized

Facilities need to be clean

Irrigation is more important than Clubhouse.

Water restrictions have had detrimental impacts.

General

Like plan to sell land to cover debt to the general fund

Golf programs need to be marketed

Concern about lack of younger players

Likes elimination of coordinator position

Disagrees with abolishing assistant superintendent position- laborers will not have the same level of expertise.

Need a contingency fund in times of drought and other water related issues.



Questions from the Small Groups.

Will the differential (tiered program) drive down the # of rounds of golf played at the Highlands?

Taxes pay for other facilities such as pools and parks. Why are we asked to raise the costs of golf rounds? Does golf have to support itself and why isn't golf treated like pools?

What is "premier" about the Highlands? What does premier mean?

Why doesn't the City share some costs of maintenance and expenses for golf?

Through the years has golf subsidized other department costs?

Is the plan enough and is it sustainable?

Where did the \$800,000 in the golf fund go?

If golf rounds are declining why is it so hard to get a tee time at any of the courses (week days and weekends)?

Does golf have to pay for itself? We may not be able to become self-sustaining.

Can we find champions, like a Jim Abel, who could attract other investors to build reserves?

Can we work with NRDS, LES, Kawasaki, to improve the courses.

Can golf courses be exempt from watering restrictions?

What happens to unlimited memberships?

Does anyone know why rounds are decreasing?

What has been the response from Superintendents and Pros to this plan?

How do we draw in younger players? Ager needs more exciting programming.

What is the City doing differently in the area of maintenance than the private courses?

Have we considered charging non-residents a higher fee?